Program Research Project

UNGOVERNED SPACES IN GUATEMALA AND U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY

BY

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ABSTRACT

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A nation's inability to enforce sovereignty over its territory and the "ungoverned spaces" that this problem engenders pose clear threats to both the developing and the developed world. This paper argues that ungoverned spaces in Guatemala have serious implications for that Central American nation's internal security and threaten vital interests and ultimately the national security of the United States. The paper begins with an examination of the negative implications that ungoverned spaces have for the political, economic and social development of Guatemala's weak democracy. After demonstrating the problems that ungoverned spaces pose for Guatemala, the paper draws clear links between ungoverned spaces in Guatemala and contemporary threats to the national security and homeland defense of the United States. The paper examines transnational crimes, which thrive in Guatemala's ungoverned spaces, such as narcotics trafficking, arms smuggling, and trafficking in persons, and details the threats that they pose to United States national security. Finally, it suggests that the current mix of policies being used to confront these threats is not working and offers recommendations on how to more effectively confront these challenges.

UNGOVERNED SPACES IN GUATEMALA AND U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY

The study of "ungoverned spaces", areas inside the territorial boundaries of a nation state where central governments are unable or unwilling to enforce sovereignty, has gained increasing attention in recent years. In the Western Hemisphere, the concept of ungoverned spaces has generally been associated with Colombia and other areas where revolutionary movements have succeeded in challenging the central government's monopoly on the use for force. Increasingly, ungoverned spaces are being recognized in other parts of the hemisphere, including the Tri-Border region centered on Ciudad del Este, Paraguay, and the Central American nations of Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

A nation's inability to enforce sovereignty over its territory and the "ungoverned spaces" that this problem engenders pose clear threats to both the developing and the developed world. Ungoverned spaces in Central America threaten individual nations in the region and also threaten the national security of the United States. This paper argues that ungoverned spaces and the lack of territorial sovereignty in Guatemala not only have serious implications for that Central American nation's internal security, but also threaten vital interests and ultimately the national security of the United States.

The paper begins with an examination of the negative implications that ungoverned spaces have for the political, economic and social development of Guatemala's weak democracy. After demonstrating the problems that ungoverned spaces pose for Guatemala, the paper draws clear links between ungoverned spaces in Guatemala and contemporary threats to the national security and homeland defense of the United States. The paper examines transnational crimes, which thrive in Guatemala's

ungoverned spaces, such as narcotics trafficking and trafficking in persons, and details the threats that these crimes pose to U.S. national security. Finally, it suggests that the current mix of policies being used to address these threats is not working and offers recommendations on how the United States Government could more effectively confront these challenges. Specifically, the paper argues that given the vital U.S. interests at stake an increase in the employment of "hard" (military) power is overdue.

The study of ungoverned space in the developing world and their potentially harmful impact on U.S. national security has increased in the post-Cold War period. Transnational crime that thrives in ungoverned spaces is recognized as a significant threat to the security of the developed world. Academics and policy makers have developed a generally agreed upon definition of the term "ungoverned space" that describes sections of the national territory (to include airspace and maritime areas) where the central government of an independent nation is unable or unwilling to enforce sovereignty. National military, police, and judicial institutions are unable to enforce the rule of law and the central government is unable to exert sovereignty across the entire spectrum of responsibilities generally associated with a Nation-State.[1]

The Rand Corporation, in a study commissioned by the United States Air Force to examine the characteristics of ungoverned spaces across the globe, lists four variables that can be used to measure the extent of "ungovernability" in a nation or region. These variables include: "(1) the level of state penetration of society; (2) the extent to which the state has a monopoly on the use of force; (3) the extent to which the state controls its borders; and (4) whether the state is subject to external intervention by other states".[2]

The first three of these variables are clearly evident in the context of contemporary Guatemala. Throughout much of the county the state is unable to provide even the most rudimentary services to include adequate education, health care, and basic infrastructure to its citizens and consequently measures a very low level of state penetration into the fabric of everyday society.[3] Far from having a monopoly on the use of force, state military and police units are often forced to look the other way at best or abandon their posts at worst in the face of overwhelming force from shadowy paramilitary organizations and even a peasant mob bent on avenging a perceived injustice.[4] Porous borders and weak immigration and customs enforcement further characterize Guatemala today. It is only the 4th variable, the extent to which a state is subject to external intervention, which is not present. No foreign nation is conspiring to increase ungovernability in Guatemala.

Ungoverned Spaces in Guatemala

The geographic dimensions of the ungoverned spaces in Guatemala are substantial. In the northern third of the country, called Petén, the rule of law and reach of the central government is at its most tenuous. International organized crime syndicates are able to operate outside of the jurisdiction of legal governments by outspending and out maneuvering their less agile state adversaries.[5] Hired armies successfully challenge the central government for territory and freedom of movement. Vast sections of sparsely populated territory, *national parks* in name only, are used by drug traffickers and other criminal enterprises with relative freedom. In Petén's far north the *Laguna del Tigre* national park is a principle termination point for air shipments of cocaine from Colombia to the United States.[6] Clandestine airstrips emerge from the swamps during

the dry season and an over flight of the area shows countless hulls of small aircraft, crash-landed into the park; their cargo more valuable than the airframe.[7] The *Laguna del Tigre* region is accessible by land only via a ferry that crosses the Rio San Pedro at the town of El Progresso. Military and police counter-narcotic operations are telegraphed to traffickers and routinely come up empty-handed.

Central Petén, focused on the town of Sayaxche and the river network of the Rio de la Passion and its tributaries, has similarly become no-go territory for law enforcement personnel and a rich environment for the international narcotics trade.[8] Similar to the case of the ferry crossing at El Progresso to the north, limited road infrastructure and a ferry crossing chokepoint give the criminals the upper hand. Traffickers are able to track government forces' movements north. Increasingly large landowners challenge central government authority by establishing private airfields on their land. Attempts to shut down these illegal enterprises often meet with armed resistance from the landowners.[9]

In southern Petén the Sierra Lacandon and the Rio Usumacinta border region with Mexico has likewise become hostile territory for police and military forces. Government operations to move into the Sierra Lacandon Mountains and patrol the southern Petén river border with Mexico are ambushed and isolated outposts are confined to their barracks.[10]

Likewise, the entire western border region with Mexico can be effectively described as ungoverned territory. Hundreds of *pasos ciegos* (blind passes) dot the border. The town of Tecun Uman is the archetypical smuggler's warren. Black market commercial goods flow freely across the border in plain sight of officials from both nations. Similar

conditions exist along the rest of the Guatemalan – Mexican border. Customs and immigration shacks at official crossing sites are abandoned. At river crossing sites $3-$5.00 U.S. is charged for an unchallenged entrance into Mexico. Goods and people flow freely. Illegal immigrant way stations dot the highways and dirt roads that connect Central America with Mexico, and ultimately the United States.[11]

Large portions of Guatemala's maritime regions are equally ungoverned. On the Pacific Coast traffickers operating from large "mother ships" sailing from Colombian and Ecuador move shipments of illegal narcotics north. Unwilling to challenge the better guarded Mexican coast, traffickers dump their cargo in Guatemalan waters to be picked up by smaller "fast boats" operating out of the ports of Ocos and Champerico. More recently traffickers have turned to using submarines in these waters to transport cocaine north from Colombia.[12] Guatemala's Pacific Coast is also a favorite landfall for human traffickers. Well established trafficking routes bringing South Americans, Asians and others north often end in Guatemala. The human traffickers' modus operandi is similar to that used by the drug traffickers. Large ships, operating in international waters bring their human cargo north. Once in Guatemalan territorial waters, smaller "fast boats" pick up the travelers and link them up with traffickers on land to continue their trip north.[13]

The situation on the Caribbean Coast with regards to narco-trafficking is slightly nuanced. The heavily patrolled Caribbean makes it difficult for large mother ships to sail north from Colombia. Instead, traffickers prefer to "hopscotch" shipments of cocaine up the Caribbean coast of Central America from isolated areas of Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and Belize. Guatemala's Bahia de Amitique and the Rio Sarstun

riverine network provide isolated areas free from central government control where traffickers can operate in relative freedom.

The Guatemalan Response to Ungoverned Territory

The Guatemalan Central Government's response to the issues of ungoverned territory outlined above is half hearted at best and institutional ineffectiveness in dealing with these problems is well documented. In some cases the blame can be placed on lack of funding and disorganization. In many other cases corruption is at the root.

The Guatemalan Military has neither a constitutional mandate nor the budget to effectively confront these challenges to national sovereignty. Two decades of budget shortfalls and neglect, combined with lukewarm support from the United States, have left the armed forces in shambles. Transportation assets are limited to an aging fleet of trucks and commercial SUVs. Ground transportation for routine supply trips or more ambitious military operations is unavailable. The situation in the air is worse. The Guatemalan Air Force is limited to a handful of fixed and rotary wing assets. Tactical communications are non-existent. Cell phones are the principal means of communication in the cities and towns. Most of the nation's ungoverned spaces are without cell phone coverage. Only satellite phones work in these areas and only the traffickers have satellite phones.[14] These challenges have led the military to adopt a "Fort Apache" mentality. Platoon sized elements are dropped off at bases throughout the countryside. Left without communications and transportation and with limited sustainment and resupply capability, the troops fend for themselves until their tour is up. Significantly more time is spent looking for clean drinking water than in exercising national sovereignty and manning frontier posts.

The police forces and judicial system are in still worse shape. Coupled with the same resources constraints and logistics challenges as the military, they are also hamstrung by low moral and institutionalized corruption at all levels. Outside of the major cities a "wild-west" atmosphere pervades and police are often confined to their station houses or even run out of town by the disaffected citizenry.[15] Even the most highly vetted anti-drug and anti-corruption units eventually fail. Warehouses of captured narcotics are emptied by the police officers assigned to guard them. In one of the most notorious examples of this phenomenon, 475 kilograms of cocaine, captured during a joint US-Guatemalan operation, were emptied out of a high security police warehouse in the middle of the night.[16] Similarly, the judicial system is unable to effectively prosecute and hold traffickers and other criminals. Jail breaks are commonplace and high profile traffickers are able to slip away and evade detection while judges sign release orders in the middle of the night to avoid scrutiny.[17]

Constitutional restrictions limiting military and police powers exacerbate the situation. Guatemala's history of civil war and human rights abuses, perpetrated by military authorities during the nation's thirty year civil war, helped ensure that its current Constitution places significant restrictions on authorities at all levels. Constraints on the use of force and the judicial system, aimed at protecting the nation's indigenous population and other disadvantaged sectors of society from abuses of authority, are now used by traffickers and common criminals to skirt the law and remain on the street, or get out of jail once captured.

The Guatemalan Government has sought resolution of its problems associated with ungoverned territory through the use of joint and interagency task forces. In the

hinterland the military provides back-up firepower and logistic support to park rangers who have the authority and the desire, but not the wherewithal, to enforce the nation's laws. In the cities and towns the approach is similar. Joint military and police patrolling and operations are routinely conducted. The military is tasked to provide back up and logistic support to the police, who have the constitutional authority to make arrests. These joint task forces have yielded few tangible results. While workable concepts on the drawing board, these schemes have not been backed up with funds for implementation. The military, already stretched to the limit, is unable to take on new burdens and responsibilities. Additionally, human rights activists and constitutional watchdogs, both inside and outside of Guatemala, decry this solution as the first step down a slippery slope that will lead back to the bad old days of military rule.

Implications for Guatemala

The Guatemalan Government's inability to enforce territorial sovereignty has allowed it to become a major trafficking state. A significant portion of the air, sea and land routes that bring illegal immigrants, narcotics and goods into the United States pass through Guatemala. Guatemala is the last stop for shipments of cocaine greater than 100 pounds before they are broken into smaller packages for further shipment through Mexico into the United States.[18] Well established illegal immigrant routes pass through Guatemala, which serves as a land bridge for foot traffic north for those seeking to enter the United States and as a drop off point for maritime transported immigrants smuggled from further afield.

The implications of these circumstances for Guatemala are predictable. The last several years have witnessed a *"Colombianization"* of Guatemala. The vast sums of

money associated with illegal criminal activity in the region have had a corrosive effect on local institutions and individuals. Government employees and entire police forces and political parties are bought by international criminal organizations. Lack of resources and the high incidence of corruption also lead to increase in lawlessness, ungovernability and increasingly porous borders. Additionally, it bears mentioning that Guatemala is a heavily armed society. Large quantities of small arms were brought into the country by both parties of the ideological conflicts of the 1960-1990s. Peace has not made the weapons disappear; instead they are available for criminals to use.[19]

A related phenomenon which contributes to the Colombianization of Guatemala is the rise of gangs (*maras*), who use connections to organized crime to expand their power and wealth. As cocaine moves through Guatemala a residual amount remains as payment for services rendered. The maras profit by setting up distribution and sales networks in major urban areas to move this residual cocaine. In weak democracies like Guatemala, the rise in the number and power of the maras threatens the consolidation of democratic principles and likely aggravates the doubts of sectors of society who seek a return to authoritarian rule. This phenomenon could also lead to the growth of extra-official armed groups aimed at countering the maras, thereby accelerating the Colombianization of Guatemala.[20]

Implications for the United States

Ungoverned spaces in Guatemala and the associated illegal trafficking of narcotics, migrants, and other commodities negatively affect the national security of the United States and will increase as the level of ungovernability in that Central American nation increases. The U.S. Southern Command has long viewed the existence and growth of

ungoverned space in Guatemala and elsewhere in the hemisphere as a threat to U.S. national security. Former SOUTHCOM Commanders, General James Hill and General Banz Craddock both testified before Congress that drug trafficking, arms transfers, and human smuggling in Central America negatively impacted U.S. national security.[21] Likewise, current SOUTHCOM Commander, Admiral James Stravitis, in his 2007 Posture Statement before Congress, linked the same set of challenges to the national security of the United States.[22]

So long as the "*war on drugs*" remains a U.S. national security priority, ungoverned spaces in Guatemala will continue to pose a threat to the security of the United States. As outlined above, illegal narcotics entering the United States increasingly pass through Guatemala. The American Ambassador to Guatemala, Stephen McFarland, recently stated that between 200-300 tons of cocaine pass through Guatemala annually in route to the United States.[23] Additionally, Guatemala remains a production source for opium destined for eventual consumption as heroin in the U.S. In early March 2007 the Guatemalan government reported the destruction of 739 hectares of poppy plants in the San Marcos region of Guatemala on the border with Mexico. U.S. officials place the value of the drug at $12.67 billion dollars, twice the Government of Guatemala's entire 2009 budget.[24]

Illegal immigration, which is facilitated by ungoverned spaces, is a second area that negatively impacts U.S. national security. Ungoverned spaces in Guatemala have become a principal staging ground and transit point for people seeking to enter the United States illegally. To think of these potential migrants solely in terms of Central Americans coming into the U.S. to work in jobs that Americans distain is to turn a blind

eye to a significant portion of the problem. Well established international routes funnel migrants from outside Latin America into the United States through Guatemala. Potential migrants from the Middle East and Asia fly into South and Central American nations where lax enforcement and corruption allow them to make landfall. Once in the Americas they begin their trek north to the United States and Canada by a variety of means. Many of these paths lead through Guatemala.[25]

Neither can the illegal traffic of commercial goods be overlooked as a threat to U.S. national security. Free trade agreements such as the Central American and Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA - DR) make it much easier to move goods from Guatemala into the United States. Increasingly, exporters from other parts of the world seek to skirt U.S. customs enforcement by "laundering" their goods through Guatemala**.** Pirated and counterfeit goods enter Guatemala from China and other source countries and are then available for further shipment to the United States.[26] Additionally port security remains a problem in Guatemala as elsewhere. Container ports at Puerto Quetzal on the Pacific Coast and Puerto Santo Tomas de Castillo on the Caribbean Coast suffer from negligence and endemic corruption. Well documents cases of corruption illustrate that illegal narcotics and manufactured goods enter Guatemala and eventually the U.S. market through these container ports.[27]

Given the litany of challenges to U.S. national security outlines above; well established smuggling routes for illegal narcotics, migrants, and manufactured goods, local corruption and negligence, and territory where potential enemies of the United States can operate freely, it is undeniable that Guatemala is part of the "soft underbelly"

of U.S. homeland defense. The leap from undocumented migrant workers to a high profile terrorist and from cocaine to material for a dirty bomb is not so great.

Current U.S. Interagency Response

The U.S. Government's response to these challenges to national security has not been up to the task. The Department of State is the lead U.S. Government agency responsible for formulating and executing American foreign policy. The State Department has proven reluctant to take action against national security threats posed by ungoverned space in Guatemala. This is likely due in part to an institutional reluctance to support assistance for the Guatemalan military and police forces. This unwillingness to take action and press for the relaxing of congressional roadblocks on security assistance funding destined for Guatemala should be viewed in light of an institutional reluctance to train and equip the Guatemalan military dating back to the Civil War era military governments.[28] So strong is this institutional antipathy in certain sectors of the Department of State and the Congress that Guatemala is often lumped with Sudan, Indonesia and other pariah states when Foreign Military Financing (FMF) legislation is discussed on Capitol Hill.[29]

The U.S. Department of Justice has worked aggressively in Guatemala to partner with local authorities and support counternarcotics efforts designed to halt the flow of illegal narcotics into the United States and turn back the tide on lawlessness and ungovernability. The Department of Justice's principal overseas law enforcement arm, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), works closely with U.S. and host nation forces to bolster the rule of law in Guatemala and combat the forces that profit from ungoverned spaces. The DEA routinely conducts combined operations with Guatemalan police and

military forces and has likewise been successful in partnering jointly with the Department of Defense.[30] Victories are few and far between though, and rampant corruption hampers activities.

Despite Congressional prohibitions and State Department reluctance, the Department of Defense (DoD) has maintained a relatively robust presence in Guatemala in terms of exercises and operations. The U.S. Southern Command has taken the lead in the interagency in highlighting the threats to U.S. national security posed by ungoverned spaces in Guatemala. As already highlighted, Combatant Commanders routinely testify before Congress regarding ungoverned spaces and illegal trafficking in Guatemala and use their influence to lobby lawmakers to recognize and respond to the threat. Additionally, Combatant Commander's have been willing to use their discretionary funds and Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) budget to assist the Guatemalan military and help safeguard U.S. national security.

Due to the Congressional restrictions on U.S. military assistance to Guatemala, COCOM TSC monies are focused almost exclusively on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) projects.[31] Annual and semi-annual events include construction of schools and clinics and medical, dental and veterinary missions designed to support segments of the population not adequately serviced by Guatemala's central government. U.S. military training of Guatemalan forces is limited almost exclusively to the areas of human rights and humanitarian assistance. Little if any "training or equipping" of the Guatemalan military designed to curtail illegal trafficking or counter the negative effects of ungoverned territory is undertaken.

The U.S. Joint Interagency Task Force-South (JIATF-South), headquartered in Key West, Florida, is a second arm of the DoD actively involved in countering the spread of ungoverned territory and helping to combat lawlessness in Guatemala. JIAFT-South tracks illegal narcotics shipments bound for the United States and routinely hands targets off to DEA and host nation law enforcement agencies for interdiction. While JIATF-South's focus is on stemming the flow of illegal narcotics into the United States, its organization could easily be applied to counter weapons and human trafficking, and international terrorism.[32]

Technically not a part of the interagency process, the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the development and implementation of policy should also be examined. NGOs play a critical role in the formulation of U.S. Government policy toward Guatemala. American, European and homegrown NGOs have successfully inserted themselves into the policy-making process by establishing themselves as the pre-eminent human rights watchdogs in the region. With roots firmly planted in the "bad old days" of the Civil War period, these groups generally resist U.S. government assistance to military and police forces in the region. The Washington Office on Human Rights (WOLA) has played a particularly important role in blocking the lifting of Congressional sanctions aimed at denying military assistance to Guatemala.[33]

Multinational Responses and Responsibilities

Current American foreign policy relies heavily on a multinational approach and solving the problem of ungoverned territory in Guatemala will surely require international support. American diplomats and other members of the U.S. interagency should work through the Organization of American States and other multinational organizations to

seek solutions to the region's problems. Similarly, the U.S. should use its considerable influence with regional hegemons such as Mexico and Brazil to find and support Latin American solutions to this myriad of challenges.

Latin American nations should seek to address the challenges of drug trafficking and transnational organized crime through international cooperation with neighboring states and the consumer nations in the developed world. Single state attempts to control drug trafficking and other illicit activity ignore the fact that these are global problems that require global solutions.[34] Globalization and the transnational nature of international organized crime allow criminals to operate outside of the traditional state structure. The transnational nature of organized crime in the increasingly globalized world of the 21st Century requires international and transnational approaches to problem solving. Individual nations and multinational organizations will not, however, be able to confront these challenges without a significantly increased commitment from the United States.

Recommendation: *Plan Guatemala*

The U.S. interagency must redouble its efforts to recognize, highlight, and counter the threat to U.S. national security posed by ungoverned spaces in Guatemala. The interagency response to these challenges needs to be strengthened, coordination improved, budgets increased, and priorities realigned. The Department of Defense, through the U.S. Southern Command and other agencies, has a long history of working proactively in Guatemala and other Central American nations to assure the national security of the United States while at the same time improving local conditions through a very active Humanitarian Assistance / Disaster Relief program. DoD must seek to leverage the COCOM's history in the region by increasing funding and resources aimed

at combating ungoverned spaces and the pervasive culture of lawlessness in Guatemala.

A combination of increased funding and a shift in prioritization could allow for the implementation of a *Plan Guatemala*, similar to Plan Colombia. Six billion dollars in U.S. military aid has been made available to Colombia since 1999 and the results appear promising.[35] America has aggressively funded and trained elite counterinsurgency and counternarcotics battalions. This aggressive, "Big M" approach has significantly curtailed the amount of ungoverned space, illegal trafficking, and threats to U.S. national security originating in Colombia. While the plan's detractor's claim that Plan Colombia has done little to stop the flow of cocaine into the U.S., few can argue that it has not helped to drastically turn Colombia's domestic security picture around. Lawlessness is down considerably and increased attention and funding from the U.S. has helped to greatly reduce the amount of ungoverned territory. Bogota is now able to exert sovereignty over much more of its national territory.[36] A combination of increased funding and a shift in prioritization of currently allocated resources could allow for the successful implementation of a Plan Guatemala.

The case of El Salvador is a prime example of what can be accomplished with financial commitment and unwavering attention. Since the end of its civil war El Salvador has enjoyed unwavering commitment from the U.S. in terms of resources, receiving the lion's share of financial assistance aimed at regional militaries. Two of the most important tools that the U.S. Government has to support its regional stability goals and enable friends and allies to improve their defense capabilities are the FMF and International Military Education and Training (IMET) programs.

FMF is administered by the Department of State and is the U.S. Government's program for financing through grants or loans the acquisition of U.S. military articles, services, and training. In 2007 El Salvador received $7.23 million in FMF. Guatemala received nothing. In 2008 El Salvador received $4.76 million in FMF. Guatemala received nothing. In 2009 El Salvador is projected to receive $4.8 in FMF. Guatemala will receive $496,000.[37]

The IMET program provides military training on a grant basis to students from allied and friendly nations. In 2007 El Salvador received $1.82 million in IMET funding. Guatemala received $467,000. In 2008 El Salvador again received $1.6 million in IMET funding. Guatemala received $476,000. In 2009 El Salvador will received $1.6 million in IMET funding. Guatemala will receive $550,000.[38] An important footnote regarding these IMET statistics is the type of IMET that Guatemala is eligible to receive. Due to congressional restrictions Guatemala has been limited to participation only in the "expanded" IMET program since 1995. The expanded IMET program deals principally in human rights, civil affairs, and other non-lethal aspects of military training.[39]

The contrasts between Guatemala and El Salvador could not be more striking. El Salvador has a modern military capable of controlling its borders and standing side-by-side with American soldiers in Iraq. The nation is not an illegal trafficking nexus and its central government is able to exert sovereignty over its entire national territory. Clearly, the disparity in the level of U.S. commitment and assistance to these two countries has significantly contributed to their strikingly different levels of military preparedness.

Increased U.S. military assistance to Guatemala, including trainers and advisors, coupled with a significant increase in FMF and IMET funding, would directly benefit the

national security of the United States at a fraction of the cost currently being spent on operations in Iraq or Afghanistan. A comprehensive well financed approach that included the establishment of a U.S. Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) would likely meet with support from the government of Guatemala.[40] The JSOTF's ability to effectively partner with the U.S. DEA and Guatemalan civil and military authorities to counter illicit trafficking and the threats posed by ungoverned spaces would be significant. Many of the assets required to establish this level of support are already in the region. Joint Task Force Bravo, stationed at Soto Cano airbase, Honduras, could provide the required helicopter lift assets. Trainers and advisors working in Colombia, Ecuador and elsewhere in the region could be shifted to the Guatemalan effort. There can be little doubt that dedicated aviation support and an on the ground presence of would greatly enhance the U.S. Government's ability to assist Guatemalan authorities in their struggle to exert sovereignty within their borders.[41]

The U.S. Government has taken steps toward recognizing the threats to America posed by lawlessness in Central America. The Merida Initiative is a security assistance package aimed at combating drug trafficking and other forms of transnational crime in Mexico and Central America. While the bulk of the $1.4 billion is destined for Mexico, smaller amounts of the assistance will be allocated to Central American nations including Guatemala.[42] Unfortunately little of this aid will end up benefitting the Guatemalan military. Current plans call for funding to be spent on programs such as the Central American Fingerprint Exchange, the Transnational Anti-Gang Initiative, improved policing and police equipment, and improved prison management.[43]

Future initiatives must break the current paradigm and provide effective training and modernization assistance to the Guatemalan military. A better trained and equipped Guatemalan military, able to exert sovereignty over its entire national territory, would significantly increase U.S. national security. A Plan Guatemala, similar in scope to Plan Colombia, would significantly strengthen America's southern border and reduce threats to the United States by helping to foster a Guatemala more capable of partnering with U.S. and neighboring states and effectively exert sovereignty within its national territory.

Endnotes

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